

Cairngorms National Park Authority

Cairngorms National Park
Historic Designed Landscapes Project

Site Research Report
05 Skellater

Consultants

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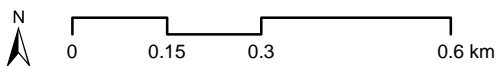
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Legend

-  Cairngorms National Park Boundary
-  Designed landscape provisional boundary

Site 5

Skellater House



May 2013

05 Skellater

County Aberdeenshire
Parish Strathdon
NGR NJ 313 107; OS 1:25,000 Sheet 405 (West)

DESIGNATIONS

Listing Skellater House, including Skellater Cottage, HB Number 16173 – Category A (1971)

LOCATION AND EXTENT

Skellater House stands on rising ground to the north of the River Don, in Strathdon, approximately 4km south-west of the neighbouring settlements of Strathdon and Bellabeg, on the north side of the A944. The house stands at the head of a long, narrow tree-lined park, where it is flanked on either side and to the rear by gardens and sheltering planting. The house is approached through the park, with a parallel service road to the east. Although the 'core' landscape appears never to have extended beyond the long rectilinear park and gardens, the house lies at the centre of a semi-circular hollow between the neighbouring hills of Craig of Westertown, Sron Aonghais and Carn More, once well-planted with trees, which would have served as a back-drop to the house when viewed from the public road, and which would have sheltered the fields which surround the house.

LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT

Maps and documentary evidence



Blaeu 1654

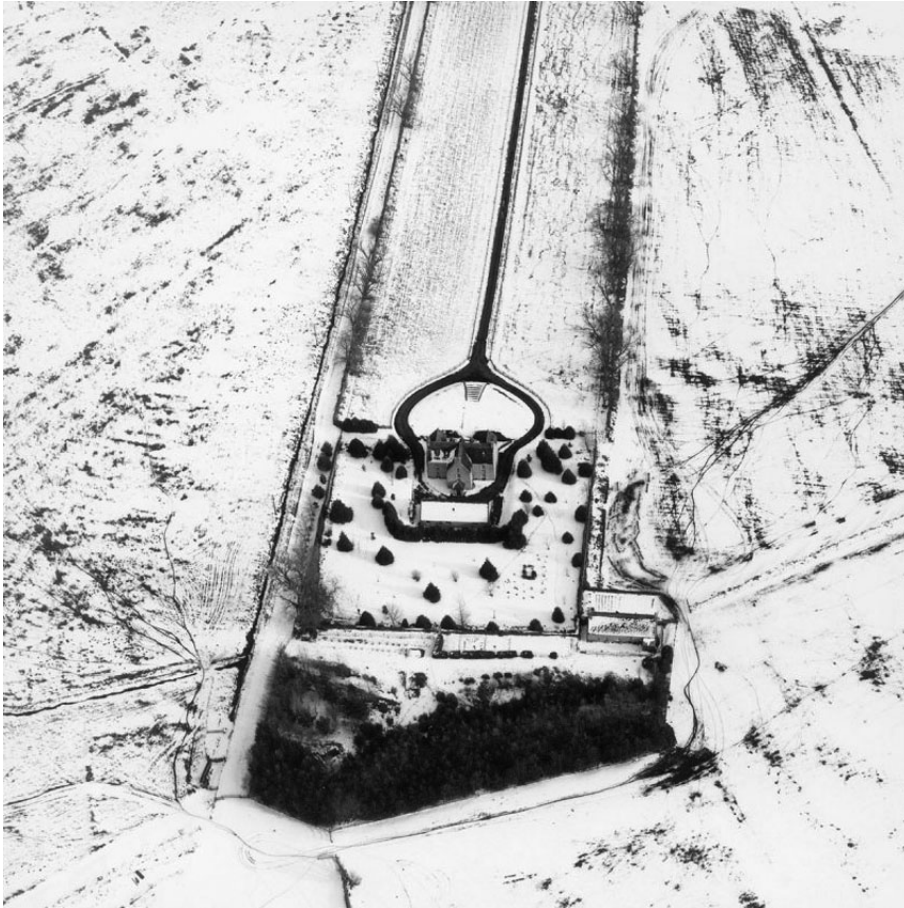


Roy's Military Survey c1750

Gordon (c1650) marks the two neighbouring settlements of 'E[aster] Skelletor' and 'W[ester] Skelletor', together with the 'Skelletor R[iver]' to the west. Blaeu (1654), too, marks 'Skelletor' as a settlement. On Roy (c1750) the house of 'Scalater' is shown within a rectangular walled enclosure, the northern half of which is tree-line, the southern half unplanted. The surrounding ground is shown as unenclosed grazing, though with a strip of rig cultivation running westwards along the north bank of the River Don to the neighbouring township town settlement of 'W[este]r Scalater'. Robertson (1822) shows the house, but without any indication of associated planting. Extensive hill planting to the north of the house is first seen on the OS First Edition (1867) and is also apparent on the OS Second Edition (1900), though this appears much-diminished in extent by the time of the OS Pouplar Series (1929). A photograph of 1902 shows the house at the head of a grass park, with a part-fenced, part-walled enclosure to the rear, lined with mature trees, beyond which a dense plantation is seen in the background. There appears to have been a further diminution in tree cover on the neighbouring hill-slopes during the mid-to-late 20th century. The western approach to the house appears to be a recent feature, as the old OS maps both show the original approach to have been up the eastern edge of the grass park.

Building history and ownership

Timperley (1967) notes William Forbes of Skellater as laird of one of the larger landholdings in Strathdon Parish in the 1770s, along with Alexander Anderson of neighbouring Candacraig and Alexander Forbes of Inverernan. The house is said by Shepherd (2006) to date from c1600, though Historic Scotland states that it was built for Lachlan Forbes in 1727. Subsequent names connected with the property during the 18th century are George Forbes and John Forbes,



Skellater aerial view under snow 1995

prior to the house becoming part of the nearby Newe Estate, another Forbes property. After being used as a shooting lodge during the 19th century, the house appears to have fallen into disrepair for a time. Shepherd (2006) mentions the restoration of the house during the 1970s.



*John Forbes of Skellater
1732-1808*

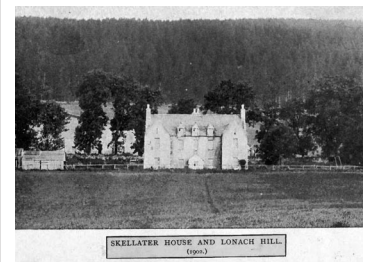
APPENDIX

Historical notes

Rev. Robert Meiklejohn 1838 (NSA) describes the house as being “of an older date” than most others in the parish.

OS Name Book 1867 (Strathdon, Aberdeenshire Book 81, p163) describes “Skellater, a modern mansion, or rather a good plain dwelling house erected in 1727 by Lachlan Forbes Esq. and now used as a shooting lodge, and having offices, outhouses, garden etc. attached. But the offices are let separately along with the farm, and although adjoining, is sometimes called Mains of Skellater. The property of Sir Charles Forbes Bart of Newe Castle. Skellater signifies the forked or spread hills”.

Shepherd 2006 describes “a crisply harled T-plan laird’s house ... flanked by gabled advanced wings ... severe yet stylish”.



Skellater 1902